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141 Young people of both sexes are attractive and robust,
[146] but hard work, undernourishment and, in the case of the women, constant child-bearing often make them appear old when they have only reached what should be the prime of life.

591 Family life among the Karens is not unlike that of
428 the ordinary European family. They do not have the
596 patriarchial family system of the Chinese, and each married couple usually has its own house in which to live. Often the woman brings her young husband to live with her parents and he inherits their lands on their decease.

582 Marriage in the early days was strictly within the tribe.
163 Even marriage with those of other Karen tribes was looked
165 down upon. Karen women usually bear as many as ten or more children, but often raise less than half of them,
858 due to their lack of knowledge of sanitation. Karen
888 fathers are usually fond of their children and take as good care of them as they know how. Their love is generally sentimental and children are allowed to rule the household. Old people usually receive good care for the Karens always reverence age.

IV

OCCUPATIONS

243 In the early days the Karens were concerned with
433 wresting a living for themselves from the ground where they lived. Almost without exception they were cultivators of the soil and raised rice, their principal food. They followed the two methods usually found in Burma, the mountain method in the hills and the paddy-field method on the plains.

243 In the hills the wasteful way of cultivating rice was that of clearing a section, called in Burmese a *taung-ya*,

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on the mountain side. Everything but the largest trees would be cut in the cool season of January or February and left to dry until just before the rains began in May. Then it would be set on fire. Precautions were taken to keep the fires from spreading to the neighbouring dry forest, but these were often futile and vast areas were frequently ablaze for days until the rains would put out the fires. In this way large quantities of forest containing valuable timber would be sacrificed for a small quantity of rice. The burning would leave a deposit of ash that would act as a fertilizer for the rice to be planted. It would also kill the seeds of weeds and trees and give the rice a chance to get a start over the more vigorous growth of native plants.

243 ●

[482 415]

Karen girl carrying bamboo water pots

243 825

On the plains they used buffaloes and oxen to plough when the rains had covered the ground with a few inches of water. The flowers of the pyinma tree that comes out just before the work begins with the coming of the rains is called *P'Nah Haw* meaning "the buffalo weeps", for they say that when the buffalo sees this tree in bloom he weeps because he knows that he must soon begin ploughing.

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243 412 ploughing. Almost always they used the small wooden plough, sometimes tipped with iron. I have seen a herd of six or eight buffaloes driven around and around over the muddy ground as a method of preparing it for receiving the seed.

As soon as the rain had softened the ground the rice or, more properly, the paddy would be planted by hand, being poked into the ground with a sharp stick. The Karens invented few tools for their work and did not readily adopt those used by other peoples. They 241 weeded with rude hoes, or with sticks and fingers. As the crop matured, they had to fight many varieties of animals and birds. They would construct rude fences of bamboo to keep out wild pig and deer. To protect themselves from the birds they strung small ropes made of various fibres around the field and attached bamboo clappers and later tin cans or anything that would make a noise. It was the duty of the women or small boys to sit in the central hut where they lived during the time of cultivation and pull these strings to drive away the marauding birds which came in large flocks to get their fill of the succulent, newly-formed rice.

251 243 The rice was reaped by hand using a sickle with a long curved handle, and then the grain was beaten out against a bamboo bar fixed to standards set up in the ground. The wind was the winnowing machine. The grain was stored in paddy bins prepared for it until it was needed for supplying the daily table. Often these bins would be located part way between the cultivation and the village site and they were not molested for there [577] is an innate honesty among the Karens that respects that to which they have become accustomed.

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533 177 Trained choirs have sung in the cities before exacting audiences and have won praise. Because of their former experiences of being subjected to exploitation, they have taken to the American Negro spirituals and sing them with a great deal of expression. Here again they have adapted some of these to their own life and composed new tunes and songs to fit their own conditions. Probably the suffering of these war years will further develop their folk music.

173 183 To the Karen the golden age was in the dim past. It was the old men who were wise. They say: "The generation gone before had wisdom. Now we are but children. Therefore the customs that have come down to us are sacred and cannot be broken without great danger."

They are hedged about with taboos many of which they hold so tenaciously that they are still more or less in the grip of their fears; and while this lasts progress will be slow if not almost impossible. Those who made the big break and became Christians have a different attitude and yet, even with them, the old customs have not entirely lost their hold.

● 943 183 Their fear of change prevents improved methods of living. This is especially true in the hills where for untold generations they have followed the *taung-ya* (mountain cultivation). This involved the sacrifice of a fresh piece of forest each year for their rice fields. When urged to adopt a more economic method, such as terracing or rotation of crops, they would reply that their fathers and grandfathers grew rice by this method, and being poor ignorant Karens they could not do any differently.

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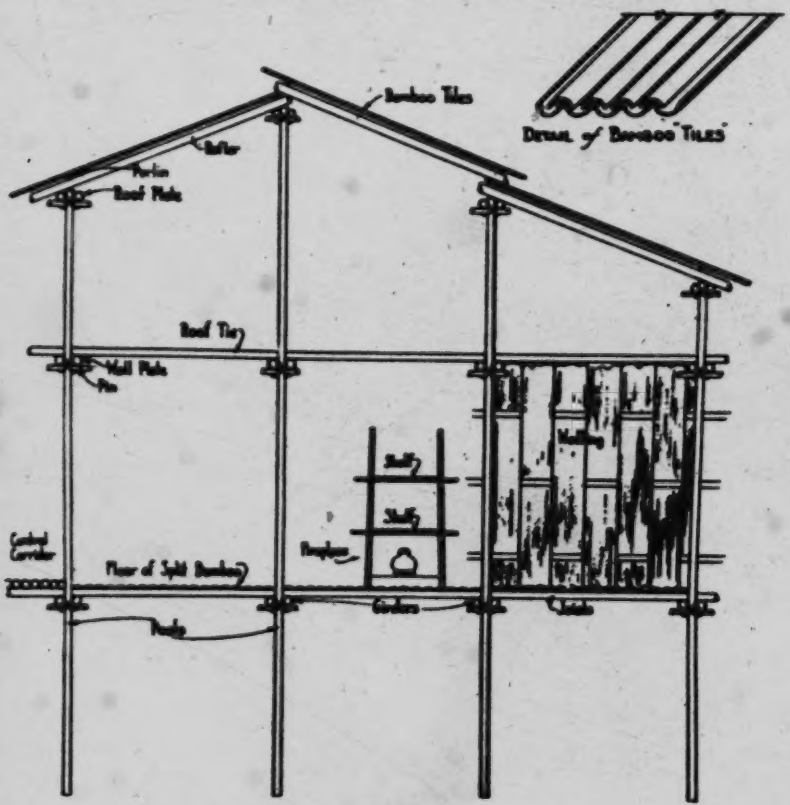
their mistress's voice. When a woman dies, her pigs are killed in order that their "k' las" may accompany her into the next world. The fowls are of a variety not unlike the wild jungle-fowls found all over the country.

On the plains buffaloes have been extensively bred for use as draft animals and in cultivating the paddy-fields. As they are slow-going creatures the small native oxen, often mistakenly identified with the "sacred ox" from having a hump like the cattle supposed to have been used in ancient Israel, have largely superseded them for draft purposes. In the Toungoo Hills oxen are employed to some extent as pack-animals, especially by the Paku tribe. Both the Paku and their neighbors, the Mawnepgha, raise a few goats, while the Red Karen are breeders of ponies to some extent.



Side View of
A Bamboo Karen House
Kathebaungyi

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stances, even a brass box. These more pretentious containers are fitted with one or two trays, on which the supplies are conveniently disposed.

The habit of tobacco smoking is almost as prevalent among the Karen as that of betel chewing. It is indulged in by both sexes and all ages. The dried leaf is rolled into a rude cigar and smoked without further preparation. Pipes of various kinds are also used. The Karen analogue of the American corn-cob pipe is the simplest form, consisting of a short section of a small bamboo with a stem of the same inserted in the side. An approach to our brier-root pipe is made of a curved root of bamboo, nicely smoothed off and fitted with a stem of monkey-bone or silver. The bowl of this latter kind of pipe is sometimes supplied with a silver lining and has a silver wire wrapped around it by way of ornamentation. The ordinary straight pipe may be etched with geometric figures in fine lines and with borders of saw-tooth and star designs. Designs incised on bamboo are found throughout the Malay countries, Borneo, and the Philippine Islands.[5]

Offerings and Traps on the Edge of a Field

The bamboo platform and basket contain the offerings of the "ta maw a hku" ceremony. Two kinds of rat traps are seen at the left. On the right is a "wa khaw" or spear trap, the point of which is under the offerings at the opening there.

[5] Skeat and Blagden, *Pagan Tribes of the Malay Peninsula*, Vol. I, pp. 296, ff.; Cole, *Wild Tribes of the Davao District*, 71; Hose and MacDougall, *Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Vol. I, 223-230.

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CHAPTER X

AGRICULTURAL PURSUITS AND OTHER OCCUPATIONS

In the Hills

The Karen's chief occupation is the cultivation of the most 243
nportant article of his diet, namely, rice. Throughout the Orient
his grain is called "paddy" during all the stages of its growth and
uring, until it is husked and polished ready for cooking. The meth-
d of cultivation in the hills is widely different from that on the
lains. We shall consider the former first, as it is more primitive
nd, until recently, was practiced by far the larger number of the
eople. In Burma this more primitive method is often spoken of as
he "ya" cultivation, from the Burmese word designating it. It is
haracteristic of this cultivation that a new hill field, called "hku"
n Karen, has to be selected, cleared, and burned off each year. The
lanting of the grain must follow immediately after all seeds and
mall roots have been destroyed by fire, or no crop can be raised
ith the primitive implements in use, on account of the rapid resus-
itation of the jungle. The ashes from the consumed vegetation
ct as a fertilizer, without which the crop would scarcely be worth
he reaping. At the present time the Government so limits the
reas open to the Karen for cultivation in some districts that a
ufficient interval does not elapse between plantings to allow the
rowth of enough timber for the production of the ashes necessary
o fertilize the soil properly. Hence, crop production is declining
n these districts. At least seven years should intervene before a
lot is cleared and planted a second time, and even this period is too
hort for the production of the best crops.[1]

[1]The "ya" cultivation, it is obvious, is most destructive of the forests. Unsuccessful ef- [241 433]
rts have been put forth to induce the Karen in the hills to give it up. It has been suggested
at the people keep gardens and raise produce for sale. This proposal overlooks the lack of
equate roads for transporting the crops to market. The Karen are backward about engaging
new undertakings. They raise their food and obtain what else they need by barter. Until
ently this mode of living has suited for them. They have not been accustomed to handling
oney or making it last long.

With the introduction of new ideas and the increase of mining concessions and forest [000]
strictions, changes are inevitable and should be planned for, especially as the granting of new
ining concessions will increase the number of outsiders. It has seemed to the present writer
at "ya" cultivation might be limited to a term of years, during which a number of British

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243 [361] 787 423 When a crop has been harvested, the village chief and elders choose the ground to be cut over the following year. Each village has its well-recognized farming areas, beyond which are the lands of the neighboring village. Each member of the communtiy then picks out his particular plot for cultivating, takes home a lump of the earth, puts it under his pillow, and sleeps on it. If he has an auspicious dream, he consults the chicken bones for a confirmation of the good omen. Securing this confirmation, he regards his choice as fixed. Otherwise, he selects another plot and repeats the ceremonies. Once his selection is approved by the auspices, the spot is called a "du la," and he clears a little space on the land, after which he addresses the spirits as follows:

[539]

"Depart all you evil spirits ('ta we ta na').
We are going to work here for our food,
To get sustenance for our wife and children.
Let no sickness come upon us.
We are going to work until it is finished."

Next he places a lump of soil on the clearing and, having wrapped the chicken bones in the leaf of a creeper ("ki ku"), he touches the lump with them, raises them towards the sky, and again touches or strikes the clod with the mystic bones. He now breaks these apart and scrapes them until he can insert splints of bamboo into the holes of the bones. If this act of divination is also successful, he is ready for work.

241 243 In the early days, when much of the primeval forest was still standing, the Karen would clear out the brush and bamboos from among the giant trees on the hillside they were preparing to cultivate. Then they raised platforms at the foot of the trees from which they could cut them above the broad-spreading buttresses at their base, leaving enough of the trunk intact to keep them from falling. When the whole hillside tract had been cut over in this manner, they felled the uppermost tree so as to crash down on those just below, and these in turn would bring down others until

officers, who should become familiar with the Karen people and language, should develop a plan in accordance with which these tribes might be given reservations of land in exchange for the valuable areas now under their control. These reservations might be either in the hills or on the plains, but the Karens should be taught to cultivate them according to approved methods, in order to gain an ample livelihood. Old racial animosities and the temptation for one people to exploit another militate against entrusting such a policy to Burman officials. It ought to be placed only in the hands of earnest, straightforward Government officials, who have gained the confidence of the Karen and are able to deal with them sympathetically but firmly. This general program would doubtless involve some outlay in supplying cattle, not to speak of competent instruction in modern agricultural methods, animal husbandry, etc.

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241 243 the whole mountain side seemed to be swept by a mighty avalanche, which resounded far and wide across the valleys, drowning the shouts of the people who were wild with excitement at seeing the culmination of the labor of weeks. The fallen timber and heaps of brush had still to lie for a fortnight or more in the hot sun until dry enough to burn.

The burning-off process, which is always a necessary part of clearing the land as mentioned above, is preceded by its appropriate ritual, in order to prevent any wandering shades or "k'las" from being consumed. As a means of warding off evil, the ritualist ties up his wrists and, as he does so, invokes the "k'las" as follows:

[539]

"Pru-u-u k'la, come back. Remain not in the forest,
Nor in the places where the jungle is newly cut.
Do not stay with evil demons.
We are about to burn our cutting.
Come back and stay in the house. Come back."

In lighting the blaze, they do so with fire from bundles of twigs that have first been sprinkled with the blood of a fowl. The burning is carefully watched, so that the fire may be kept from spreading to the surrounding forests. When bamboos are burned, the air in the hollow joints expands and bursts the stems with sharp reports. A burning field sounds like the fusillade of a battery of machine guns and affords as much delight to the Karen as a packet of firecrackers to a small boy.

When the rains have begun, the villagers begin their planting. With a sharp stick or the point of a long knife ("dah") they make tiny holes in the soft ground about a foot apart and drop into each two or three seeds of paddy. The field is now called a "hku." About this time also each family builds the little hut in its plot of ground that is to serve both as a shelter and home until the harvest shall have been gathered. It is a rude affair made of a few bamboos, either saved when the field was cleared or newly brought from the jungle, and consists of a platform, roof, and loosely fitted sides.

When the paddy has sprouted and tinged the hillside with green, another ceremony ("theh a khü") must be performed. Offerings of liquor and a fowl, which has been cooked at home, are placed upon an altar with a platform and roof, built upon six posts. The platform consists of two parts, the upper, enclosed like a miniature hut and the lower, open like a porch. Sometimes a second altar is erected upon four posts and is called "ta th' mo." Close by the first altar a flaring basket ("ta theh") is set up, which is made

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of splints woven through the split end of a bamboo, the other end of which is planted in the ground, and a similar "ta theh" is placed in front of the altar. A cup containing some rice mixed with chaff, from which projects a little bambo branch, is put upon the altar. The little branch is a "hto bo" or pole. Water is now poured over the offerings, and the cup of liquor brought from the house is placed at the foot of the altar posts. Along the path leading to the altar sharp bamboo spikes are set, following a custom said to have been handed down from earlier times, to prevent wild elephants from disturbing the offerings. When all these preparations have been completed, the spikes and the altar are smeared with the blood of a fowl, and the spirits are again addressed:

"Let this cool you and please you, O Lord of the hills, O Lord of the land, Lord of fire, Lord of heat and cold. I am making you cool and comfortable. Therefore, moderate the heat of the soil and make the paddy good. Make the rice good. Do this until the field is full."

If there is a second altar, its posts are smeared with the blood of another fowl, while the suppliant prays:

"I am offering you that which is good, that which is comforting. Therefore make the rice and paddy good, and cause it to fill the whole field."

An offering of a live chicken, with its legs tied together, is laid in the basket near the larger altar, while the following words are uttered:

"I have prepared this for you. I am doing you good. I am making it comfortable for you. When the eagle flies, the crow is afraid. When the laughing-bird laughs and the barking-deer barks, let us not fear their bad omens."

The suppliant now burns the feathers off of the dead fowls; lays down five yam leaves; cuts bits of the tip of the bill from each, treating the nails and extremities of the wings in the same way; carefully distributes the different clippings from each fowl on each of the leaves, together with a morsel of rice and, finally, disposes one of the leaves upon each of the three offering-places mentioned above, besides one upon the roof of the hut and one upon a stump in the field. Then he dips a cup of liquor and, holding it aloft, pours out a libation, saying as he does so:

"Come partake of your liquor and your rice. Make the rice and paddy better. May we work and eat in comfort and pleasure. Let

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us not be overtaken by illness. May we work until the task is finished and eat to the end."

After examining the bones of the sacrificial fowls to learn their omens, the suppliant and his family cook and eat the chickens. He then weaves a basket with large meshes and on a leaf laid in the bottom places a black pepper and sprinkles some salt. He takes a small branch from an upright-growing plant and, moving about in the growing grain, strikes both the grain and the basket, which he is carrying, and recites this prayer:

"O Guardian Bird of the field, do not let anything eat the paddy in the plot where you watch. Do not let men come in or go out. Do not permit any one who may get in to redeem himself with money, but cause him to expiate his transgression by increasing the yield of grain."

Then, cutting off the head of another fowl, he smears its blood on the basket, which he sets down in the path near the edge of the field, and returns to his house.

In many places these rites are not now so carefully observed as the above account implies. Sometimes the larger altar is dispensed with altogether, and the offerings are placed upon the little altar and in the flaring baskets. Where the elaborate ceremonial is dying out, a single fowl may be used in place of several as an oblation sufficient to please the spirits and secure a plentiful harvest. In the illustration on page 74, from a photograph taken in the Pegu Yomas, are shown the various offerings, including the live chicken that has been left on a post to die. The flaring baskets with the other offerings are also shown. The bamboo reaching above the other things was set up to mark the height which, it was hoped, the paddy might attain.

Having sought the favor of the unseen powers that preside over the growing crop, the cultivator has soon to turn his attention to the numerous enemies that prey upon his field from the neighboring jungle. Elephants, wild pigs, and a number of small animals, including rats, eat the tender plants and later feed on the ripening grain. Birds and wild fowl of various kinds are also destructive from the time the grain is in the milk. Supplication to the Guardian Bird of the field does not relieve the rice-grower from the need of fencing his plot with reeds and bamboos, setting traps and snares, and erecting scarecrows and clappers to keep devouring creatures from his grain. Little hoeing is done, but the Karen and his whole family occupy themselves in watching the growing paddy, operating

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343 the clappers, and clearing the traps. When wild elephants appear in the field, those on guard are unable to do more than produce affrighting noises from a safe distance, in the hope that the great animals will be scared away before they have destroyed the entire crop.

243 As soon as the rains are over in October the hill rice ripens 351 very quickly, and the harvest-time is near. Among some of the 343 people it is the custom for the eldest member of the family to reap a little of the grain as the first fruit, as it were, of the season's produce. After this has been done, the whole family take part in the reaping. (See page 89.) The implement used is a sickle ("xeh"), the long handle of which bends backward from the grip, the tool as a whole having the shape of the letter S. The outer end of the sickle extends under the arm of the reaper, enabling him to cut with greater ease than if he depended only on his wrist muscles. The grain is cut about half-way down the stalks and is tied in small sheaves no larger than can be easily grasped with one hand. Even though all the paddy in the plot could be cut in one day, a fraction is left for reaping until the next morning, in order to have the crop good and make it last longer. The sheaves are thrown into piles, and then collected near the hut, where they are beaten out. In some places the sheaves are beaten over the edge of a trough improvised from half of a hollow log, and in others they are beaten over a horizontal pole tied by withes to two bamboo posts, the pole being about three feet above the ground. A large bamboo mat is spread down under the pole or the trough, as the case may be, to catch the grain. Those who engage in the beating are careful to tie up their wrists and call in the "k'las" or wandering shades. They also deem it necessary to complete the threshing before they leave the place. Both men and women or either alone serve as threshers. When the paddy has all been beaten out, it is winnowed by holding it aloft in a tray or basket and letting it fall, while the wind carries the chaff to one side and the grain falls on the mat. (See page 91.) The grain is now ready to be stored in a bin built in the field or along the path leading to the village. In the districts inhabited only by Karens these bins are to be found along the jungle trails a mile or more from any village or house. Stealing is very uncommon in these regions and is severely punished if detected.[1] In the Pegu Hills near the Burmese the same security does not exist, and the paddy is stored within the village stockade.

[1] See pages 27, 148.

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243

PLOWING A PADDY-FIELD IN LOWER BURMA

WOMEN TRANSPLANTING PADDY
They simply push the plants into the soft mud, and they grow without further attention.

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243 251 343 The grain is carried in baskets on the backs of the beaters (see p. 94) and is poured slowly into the bin so as not to settle compactly. Should a basket slip and fall into the bin or its contents be dashed in, a fowl must be killed and an offering made. The storing of grain must be finished as speedily as possible; but if it can not be done in one day, the workers may rest over night.

The task of storing finished, they bring an offering for "Hpi Bi Yaw," [2] consisting of a clod of earth, a morsel of rice, and a small cup of liquor. These are placed on the paddy in the bin, and a prayer of thanksgiving is said to her. After these ceremonies the cultivator feels at liberty to take grain from his store and carry it home for food.

A small supply of paddy is always put aside in a special basket for seed, each family preserving its own, which is supposed to date back to a time when its forbears had an unusually good crop in some favorable year. Only in the last extremity will a Karen eat his seed-grain. There are many varieties of rice having their special names, each cherished by particular localities and families. Hill rice is greatly prized as being more delicious than plains rice.

244 248 The Karen raise different kinds of vegetables in their rice-fields, such as certain varieties of gourds, beans, yams, a kind of sweet potato, and peppers of various sorts, especially the red chili so generally used for condiment. Cotton is also grown in the fields along with the rice, standing until long after the paddy has been reaped. The cotton is usually considered to be the women's crop. They tend it, gather the bolls, and carry them home. The other products of the field seem to belong to all members of a family alike. The tips of various plants are used for greens. These must be plucked with the fingers and not cut off with a sharp instrument, inasmuch as the spirits dislike their being dissevered with a knife. A few plants of cockscomb are grown in the field, the red variety ("hpaw ghaw") being preferred to the yellow, because they are supposed to dazzle the eyes of the demons and prevent their harming the crop. In the lower hills sesame is often raised for its seeds, which are threshed out and sold to the Burmese, who press the oil out of them. This is serviceable in cooking and lighting. It is said to be not unlike linseed oil in certain respects, but supplies a large amount of the fats required in curries.

[462]

245 In the Toungoo and Shwegyin Hills great quantities of betel-nuts are grown. These regions furnish, I believe, the greater part

[2] The divinity who presides over the cultivation of the paddy: see page 224.

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duce and luggage from the town into the hill-country or to trading centers. They cover long distances, and before the recent war they received about eight annas (about twenty-four cents) a day for such work. In a few villages they raise oxen, which they train as pack-animals to carry grain and other produce of the hills to Toungoo or other markets. With two baskets slung on either side of a rough pack-saddle, these oxen can carry not more than one hundred and fifty or two hundred pounds each.

Karen men are experts at catching and training elephants and often become most excellent drivers for these intelligent beasts. Several travelers testify that Karen drivers seemed to be more gentle with, and careful of, their elephants than Burman drivers and acknowledge the pleasure which they derived from seeing the Karens handle their charges. Owners of elephants are usually employed by the Government Forest Department to draw logs out of the jungle to the streams, by the current of which they are floated down during the rainy season. This is a lucrative business, but the risk involved is large, because the elephants often sicken and need attention to restore them to working condition.

In some localities forest officers have employed Karens living in the hills to tend the adjacent forest reserves. But the Karen has a distaste for steady work under supervision, especially if the immediate overseer is a Burman. The latter usually does not hesitate to exhibit his feeling of superiority and to appropriate an undue share of the rewards. Only in a few instances have I known satisfactory results to be obtained through such an arrangement; but the few officers who did secure satisfactory results had a good word to speak for the Karen.

On the Plains

The Karen on the plains in Burma practice methods of cultivation like those of the Burmese, which have often been described. When the rainy season is about to begin in May the cultivator, if his land is at a distance from the village, carries thither a few bamboos and some thatch and builds a hut in his field. Here he lives during the cultivating season. The rains having softened the hard clay soil, he may resort to the very primitive practice of driving a few cattle or buffaloes around over a muddy place until they cut the ground with their sharp hoofs and thus prepare it, after a fashion, to receive the seedlings. Or he may use the method of

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243 scratching the ground with a primitive wooden plow, called a "hteh." During recent years, however, iron points have been imported which make these implements more effective. If there is considerable water, he has still a third alternative, namely, to use a kind of rough harrow, named a "hto tu." (See page 83.)

Previously, and as early as possible, the cultivator has prepared a small plot in which he has sown his paddy seed. When the plants have reached about a cubit's height, they are pulled up, tied in sheaves, and carried to the water-soaked field to be set out. This work is done either by the members of the family or by women hired for the purpose. It requires about five persons to transplant an acre in a day, their compensation being approximately eight annas a day each. The process of transplanting consists merely in sticking the plants into the mud, usually by hand but sometimes with a forked stick. (See illustration on page 83.)

243 [312] After this has been completed, little remains but to regulate the quantity of water on the fields by opening or closing the small dikes enclosing the plots. Later, when the grain is in the milk, birds are often rapacious, and I have seen Karens scaring them off their fields with a kind of slingshot. With this device they throw mud balls ("naw blū tha") from which a stalk of grass trails, fluttering and whirring as it flies, to the confusion of a flock of sparrows or weaver-birds. Larger balls, moulded and dried beforehand, have a hole through the middle. The air whistles through this when the ball is in swift motion, and big flocks of birds are badly scared by it. The slingshot, with which these two sorts of missiles are cast, consists of a bamboo of four or five feet in length with a rope attached, the missile being hurled from the end of the rope. It flies with amazing swiftness and to a great distance.

In October the rainy season is at an end, the ground begins to dry, the paddy turns a golden yellow or, as the Karen say, "becomes red," and by the first of December is about ready to be reaped. If it is not already leaning over, a man walks through it with a long heavy bamboo and pushes the stalks all in one direction to an angle of about forty-five degrees, so that it will be easier to cut. (See p. 89.) With sickles like those used in the hills, the members of the family reap in the direction in which the stalks are bent and bind the grain in sheaves about a foot in diameter. The average reaper will cut one hundred and fifty sheaves a day, but the best workers have a record of two hundred and fifty. Nowadays the sheaves are usually collected on the same day they are cut, and

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REAPING PADDY WITH SICKLES

A THRESHING-FLOOR ON THE PLAINS
Oxen and buffaloes treading out the grain

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243 carried to the threshing-floor, which is near the hut or, in the case of the fields lying near the village, is just outside the village gate. If they should be left in the field, they might not be there next morning. The pile of sheaves is always guarded, some of the men spending the night on it. They also take the precaution to hang up a gourd with a hole in it which, with a breeze blowing, emits sounds like mumbled voices.

The threshing-floor is a plot of ground perhaps a hundred feet square, or larger in proportion to the quantity of grain to be trodden out, which has been packed hard and flat by leading cattle around on it, or by using a cart or a drag for the purpose. (See p. 89.) A smoother surface is secured, not unlike that of a dirt tennis-court, by covering the floor with a coating of cow-dung. The name applied to the threshing-floor is "t'law," which is a corruption of the Burmese word "talin." The paddy sheaves are piled up in tiers around the "t'law" so as to shed water, should untimely showers fall before they are trodden out. For the threshing, however, the sheaves are distributed evenly over the floor to a depth of two feet with the heads of the grain on top. Banks of sheaves support the sides of the layers. The process of separating the grain from the heads is a tedious one. From two to a dozen cattle are tied together, and a boy or girl or, if neither of these is at hand, a woman takes the nose rope of the animal nearest him and stands in the center of the floor. The threshing often begins soon after midnight and continues until sunrise, the cattle being constantly prodded on their apparently endless round. At the conclusion of the tiresome task the other members of the family appear, remove the bulk of the straw, sweep up the smaller fragments, and begin to winnow the grain. This is accomplished either by holding it aloft in a basket and letting the wind blow off the chaff as it falls, or by pouring the grain and chaff from a platform four or five feet into a loosely-woven tray swung from a tripod of bamboos. To insure that all the chaff and dust are driven off, men and women fan the grain with closely-woven trays as it falls upon the pile. (See p. 91.)

[241] The winnowing process being finished, an offering for "Hpi Bi Yaw"* (the Karen Ceres) is placed on the apex of the pile. Lest any one should try to help himself to the grain, little tufts of charred straw are put at close intervals around the pile, after which those who have been doing all this dusty work unwrap their heads, repair to the village well or tank and indulge in a refreshing bath.

* See pp. 84, 92, 228

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WINNOWING PADDY
The grain is poured through a sieve in order to scatter it as it falls, so the wind can blow off the chaff more easily.

FANNING THE PADDY
The man on the top of the pile throws a trayful of sweepings from the threshing floor into the air and those below fan it as it falls and thus drive away all the chaff.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
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243 442 In these days it is the usual practice to sell the grain to the traders directly from the threshing-floor. Sometimes it is stored for a few months in the hope of an advance in price, but most of the smaller cultivators are compelled by their poverty to sell at once. The buyers may be Burmans, but in these later years are more often Chinese. A few Karens have done some trading in paddy, although they are generally not so successful as the traders of the other nationalities.

343 The grain kept for family use is stored in bins of bamboo made in the shape of great baskets or "weh." These "weh" vary in size from those having double the diameter of a bushel-basket up to the huge ones of ten or twelve feet in diameter and of equal height. They are set upon platforms several feet above the ground and adjoining or close to the house. The planks forming the bottom are firmly secured together and coated with cow-dung. After a bin has been filled, the top is covered with a layer of straw, well packed in, and a thick coating of cow-dung is spread over it to seal the grain.

426 435 It is not my purpose in this work to enter into a detailed economic study of Karen agriculture. Here I have but a few observations to offer. Under the conditions obtaining just before the World War, the economic outlook for the Karen cultivator was none too good. The Karen people are no more provident than the Burmese. At the beginning of the season they borrow money, for which they must pay one hundred baskets of paddy for fifty rupees of money.[7] If they have no oxen of buffaloes of their own they must hire them, paying from fifty to sixty rupees a yoke for the former and ten rupees additional each for the latter. To hire a man to work in the rainy season and to plow costs about the same as paying for the use of a team of oxen. If he is employed until the threshing is finished, he costs another fifty rupees. The yield per acre varies all the way from twenty-five to seventy baskets, according to the quality of the land and whether a little manure has been used or not. For many years the price of paddy remained close to one hundred rupees for one hundred baskets, being sometimes a little below and at others a few rupees above that price. Before the war competition and speculation had forced the price up gradually, until it reached a maximum of one hundred and thirty-five rupees.

[7] The size of baskets varies in different districts, ranging in capacity from forty to sixty pounds. Those having a capacity of forty-six pounds are now considered to be of standard size. As the price varies inversely with the size, the result is about the same.

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No one can presume to predict the outcome of the present unsettled conditions. We can only hope that better days are in store for the cultivators, whether Burman or Karen.

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If, before the war, a man owned his field and cattle without encumberance or other debts, he could till some twenty acres and make a comfortable living for himself and family. If, however, he was under the necessity of borrowing money and hiring men and cattle, he could hardly keep his head above water.

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There are some Karens who own large fields. They may have acquired them by careful management, by purchase, or by foreclosing loans. Many of these proprietors make a business of hiring out their fields to men who cultivate them at a rental of from ten to fifteen baskets of paddy per acre, the cultivator supplying his own materials and help. In case the owner has oxen, he rents them at the usual price. In addition, he usually makes a loan of cash to his tenant, on which he gets a big return, namely, a hundred baskets of paddy for the sum of fifty rupees for six months. If the tenant borrows from a money-lender, he has to pay anywhere from fifteen to fifty percent a year for it.

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On the plains the cultivator is almost entirely dependent on his single crop of paddy. If high water has washed out his first settings, there is not time enough left to raise other produce after the water has disappeared. Under these circumstances they sometimes plant sesame, but it requires only a little less time to mature than paddy. The lack of water in the dry season renders cultivation impossible without extensive irrigation.

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Along the river-bottoms may be found a few plantain groves, patches of tobacco, sugar-cane, or vegetables; but these are unusual sights. They may add a little to the cultivator's income. But very few persons derive their chief support from such gardens.

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The Karen on the plains do not observe the old religious customs of the hill people. Many times they resort to Burmese soothsayers to prognosticate the proper times for planting, reaping, and other tasks. Not a few, however, follow the old ceremonies in greater or less part. A ceremonial similar to "theh a hkū" in the hills [1] is observed on the plains where it is designated "mo a si." It is performed when the paddy is set out. Offerings are seldom seen along the paths in this region, but when the paddy has been winnowed an offering is made to "Hpi Bi Yaw" by transferring the rim of earth around a crab's burrow to the summit of the pile of

[1] See ante, pp. 76, 78.

19: Marshall M-6 (ca. 1910) 1922 APT Burma
Karen APT

paddy. A few paddy heads or even a few leaves of the ginger plant may be inserted in the burrow as a talisman to make the supply of paddy last the year out. The oblation on the threshing-floor or a similar one is then put on top of the paddy in the bin.

The Karen who is untouched by outside influence does not like to take up any other occupation than that of raising paddy. He regards his other pursuits as occasional and accessory, including the gathering of forest products, such as stick-lac and wild honey and the sale of fruit from the few mango trees he may possess. He has not been found satisfactory as a day-laborer or coolie for any continued work; he avoids hiring out as a cartman and does not succeed as a petty trader. In more extensive business he has achieved success in only a few instances. With the advantages of education, however, a few have prospered in commercial life and other callings. Many have entered Government service and risen to positions of trust. A large percentage of those who have passed through the schools are clerks and teachers. One of the largest department stores in Rangoon employs Karen clerks with satisfaction, besides Europeans. Educated Karen girls take employment as teachers and nurse-maids, and recently a few have been engaging in clerical work.

TURNING THE BUFFALOES OUT TO GRAZE
These heavy animals are easily managed by Karen children, but are easily frightened by the presence of strangers.

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343 through the east door and exit from the south side. The dragon was supposed at the time to be lying with its head to the west and its tail to the east.

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539 With the near approach of the wedding-day the friends of the groom gather at his village, blowing horns, beating on gongs and drums, striking cymbals, and chanting "htas." Early on the wedding-morn every one is astir. The rice is cooked and eaten by sunrise and, to an accompaniment of all the noisy instruments and with shouting and singing, the party sets forth. In the olden days, when the precepts of the elders were strictly observed, there was much drinking of liquor and boisterous sport on such occasions, but withal a certain decorum was not altogether lacking by reason of the halting of the procession from stage to stage and the reciting of appropriate verses. As the party is ready to leave the village they sing:

"To-day is a good day.
We shall see a maiden as fair as cotton-seed.
This is indeed a good day.
We shall behold one as fair as a cotton ball."

On setting forth, they do not overlook the unmarried girls of the village:

"Here you have not loved me.
Listen to my wedding-horns blowing yonder.
Remain here. You have not esteemed me.
Watch us depart with our horns blowing."

On the journey they sing:

"The wedding is timed at the coming of the rats.
Unless death intrudes, we shall prosper.
The marriage takes place when the rodents are here.
Unless death comes, we shall work and be happy." [1]

As they approach the bride's village a party greets them:

"The 'the kaw' blossoms in the dark of the moon.
The moon waxes and wanes.
The 'the kaw' blossoms in the full of the moon.
The moon increases and declines." [2]

The above stanza refers to the maidens, still unmarried, who are waiting from one moon to the next. The groom replies:

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[1] The years of full crops always bring a plague of rats in the hills. Thus the time of rats is a time of prosperity.

[2] This verse, recited by the villagers, refers to the girls who have not yet married and are still waiting from one moon to the next.

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
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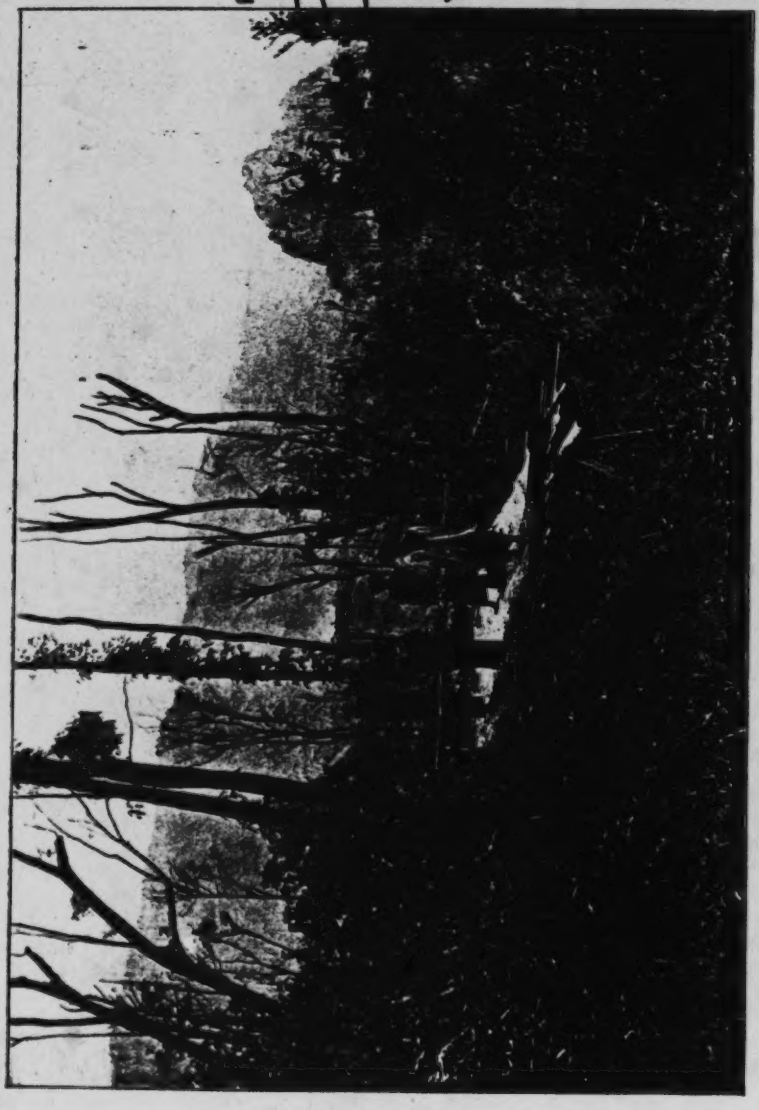
[opp. p152]



345. KARENS THRESHING ON THE HILL-SIDE.